

# West Kingdom Brewers' Guild Newsletter



*Purgatorio*  
*AS XLVIV*

## Chronicler's Corner:

Greetings! Purgatorio is upon us, and alas we only have two contributions for such a wondrous occasion. Only one fearless brewer took up my challenge—thank you so much dear Lady! Your review of a local brewing supply store is below. And another informative article from Lord Alfred.

Happy brewing!



## *A review by Lady Sciath*

We are very fortunate here in the eastern Golden Rivers/ western Shire of Mountain's Gate to have an exemplary craft brewery supply store, the Brewmeister. Miach and I have had most of our interaction with the manager, Kevin, who is incredibly helpful. When I was trying to figure out how to best manage a test run of fruit ales, without going bankrupt, he assisted me in picking the best grains, extracts and adjuncts to approximate the time period and even engaged me in some "history of ale" trivia. He followed that up by asking, "So, what SCA event are you brewing this for?", thereby also highlighting his grasp of who might be so interested in brewing as close to a historically accurate medieval ale as possible, as I had not revealed my motives to him at all.

It's probably the Scots in me, but I tend to think that everything costs too much. And I think that about the Brewmeister, too. But it costs about the same as the OTHER and unmentionable brewer supply store in the greater Sacramento area and the service is simply not to be compared, the quality of the supplies is beyond question and the cleanliness of the shop is beyond reproach.

The webpage is

<http://www.folsombrewmeister.com/servlet/-strse-template/about/Page>

Mundanely, the shop is located in Folsom, and is open every day except Tuesday.

They offer classes in all sorts of things, they sell everything from corks to winepresses, and they smoke their own malt over alder wood which is just the best smelling stuff you can imagine. I don't know what I'd do without them. They recently moved, and we assumed (given the current economic climate, especially here) that they'd gone out of business. We made a couple trips to Danegeld Tor and the Unmentionable brew supply store, where we had to scrape the dust off the tubing and pry the burrito from the hand of the apathetic shopkeeper so that he might allow us to give him our coins. When we discovered that the Brewmeister had simply moved to a bigger location with much better parking, we were overjoyed.

## *How to Judge a Homebrew*

*By Lord Alfred of Greyvale  
Greyvale Brewing*

Any time someone is judging a brewing contest or perhaps just sampling someone's homebrew with the intent of providing feedback, there are a few steps that should be considered. First of all, keep in mind that it is the beverage that you are judging or considering, not the container, labeling, or anything else. With this said, it is best to present the beverage(s) as identically as possible. Ideally, they should be poured into similar clear plastic cups to the same level and from the same angle and height of pour, allowing the different beverages the same presentation to the taster. This way, a flat beer cannot masquerade as a carbonated beer, nor can an overly carbonated beer masquerade as anything but what it is. Likewise, the clear plastic glasses allow for an excellent view of the color characteristics. In addition to being presented with the poured drink, the judge need only know the type of beverage it is supposed to be, as stated by the maker (i.e. pale ale, doppelbock, etc.). It is not the judges' task to determine what type of beer he is tasting, but whether the beer he is tasting matches the style of beer he was told it was, if you follow.

In that light, there is a clear corollary, namely that a true beer or mead competition should not be judged solely based on which beer a particular judge likes better. For instance, you may like pale ales very much and dislike stouts intensely. However, when presented with one of each in an ale-judging contest, the judge should determine which is the better beer, not which he likes better. If the stout, however much he doesn't like it, is a prime example of that style, then it should score higher than the pale he liked better, even though it was only a passing example of that style. Judging beers, wines, meads, cordials, or non-alcoholic drinks is not about what the judge "likes." Rather, it is about whether or not the brewer created an excellent example of that type for the style he was attempting. With that said, it should be noted that the criterion for any particular contest can be myriad, which is not inherently a bad thing. All of the judges do need to be made aware of the criterion and judging scale prior to beginning, however.

Now for the fun part which, to make it even more fun, requires some practice. When tasting any homebrewed beverage, there are particular steps that one should take in a particular order, so as to get the fullest appreciation of the merits of the beverage in question. Before continuing, it should be said that, while it is perhaps okay to taste and spit out wines without drinking them, it is never okay to do so when judging a beer. This is because of the bitter flavors in beers, that wines tend not to have, that only reveal themselves on the back of the tongue as the beer is being swallowed. Some refer to this as the "aftertaste." Regardless, it is an integral part of a beer and must be part of the overall judging. Therefore, all you beer judges just need to grin and bear it when being forced to drink as you judge.

As to particulars, there are ten basic steps that should be followed in an official judging:

1. Prepare any score-sheet, note-sheet, etc. that you might need depending on the judging criterion you have been given.
2. Visually inspect the bottle if you have been given such, checking for fill level, clarity, sediment or any signs of trouble (such as mysterious rings around the rim).
3. Pour the beer into a clean sampling cup, trying to agitate it as much as possible to produce a strong head without creating a cup of foam. Adjust your pour here to account for low- and/or high-carbonated beers. Be as consistent as possible in your pour technique for all beers to be judged.
4. **SMELL THE BEER.** Swirl the cup, bring it to your nose and inhale the aroma several times. Holding the beer in both hands as or before swirling to warm it slightly can help release aromas at this time.
5. **VISUALLY INSPECT THE BEER.** Look at the beer in the light. Hold it up to the light or the sun to check its clarity and color, as well as the color of the head in relation to the beer itself. Also check for carbonation bubbles: are they vigorous enough for the style or over vigorous? Also consider head retention at this time. If this style of beer is supposed to have good head retention, does this beer have it or not?
6. **SMELL THE BEER AGAIN.** Swirl the cup again, bring it to your nose and inhale the aromas a second time. Note the changes in aroma as the beer has warmed. At this point, pay particular attention to the malt and hop balance, as well as the aromas from other ingredients. Also take note of any off-aromas at this time.
7. **TASTE THE BEER.** (Finally) take a 1-ounce sip of beer and coat the inside of your mouth, swishing it around very slowly and subtly. Make sure the beer contacts your lips, gums, palate, and the top, bottom and sides of your tongue. Then swallow slowly and exhale through your nose, noting your initial impressions of the flavor characteristics: malt balance, hop flavor, sweetness/dryness, etc. Also take note of any background flavors, aftertaste, bitterness, astringency, and potential problems.
8. **TASTE THE BEER AGAIN.** This time you want to pay particular attention to the mouthfeel and body of the beer. Is it light and crisp or thick and buttery? Is the mouthfeel appropriate for the style?
9. **SMELL AND TASTE THE BEER AGAIN.** This time you are looking for your overall impression of the beer as it relates to the style of beer it is supposed to be, as named by the brewer.

## Contacts

- Finalize your score sheet and, if necessary, discuss your impressions with other judges at this point. Do not do so before this point. Do not color your impressions or your fellow judges until each of you is at this point. You do not need the approval of the other judges for your scoring, but there should at least be a general consensus. If there is not, this is the time to work it out.

While most of these comments have been aimed at judging beers, the same techniques hold true for judging any alcoholic or non-alcoholic beverages. In short: Smell, Inspect, Smell, Taste, Taste, Smell and Taste.

These techniques are not only a good standard to be used when judging a contest, but also when evaluating one of your own or a friend's beers.

And remember: it's a hard job evaluating someone else's brews . . . but someone has to do it.

For more detailed information, see the Beer Judge Certification Program at <http://www.BJCP.org>, from which this is paraphrased.

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